



### Word-Accent and Syllable-Structure in Modern Standard Arabic

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#### Abstract

A rather common feature of 'Arabic English' is what can be called *misplaced accent*. A closer look at such instances of misplaced lexical accent suggested the presence of neat patterns. Native speakers of Arabic do **not** accentuate English polysyllabic words with a haphazard choice of the syllable to be accented. This suggestion led to an analysis of hundreds of Arabic polysyllabic words. This analysis consisted of asking a number of unsophisticated native speakers of Arabic to pronounce Arabic polysyllabic words. The analysis led to the division of Arabic syllables into *light* and *heavy* (*laghu* and *guru* as described in the ancient Indian work, *Taitreya Praatishaakhya* [τ5αιτ5Πι]φα πPA]τi5ΣA]κHφα], a phonetic treatise of the Yajur Veda). Analysing Arabic polysyllabic words as being made up of *light* and *heavy* syllables helps us establish

rules for word-accent in Arabic. This analysis established the fact that in Arabic, syllable-weight determines lexical accent. This paper first establishes the importance of word-accent both for English and Arabic for the criterion of intelligibility of words and then gives an account of the types of Arabic polysyllabic words analysed and the results obtained.

*Keywords:* Word-accent, syllable-structure, light, heavy and superheavy syllables.